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ABSTRACT

A study to obtain data concerning values for child behavior from a sample of Mexican adults from Guadalajara (Jalisco, Mexico), and to compare and contrast these data with those obtained in previous research with subjects from the United States, used a sample consisting of 40 males (mean age 31.1 years) and 40 females (mean age 20.1). The subjects were given a list of 22 qualities pertaining to child behavior and were asked to rank the five traits they considered most important for a 15-year-old girl and a 15-year old boy, indicating the three characteristics they felt were least important. A common core of values for male and female raters for both boys and girls was apparent. Responsibility, obedience to parents, honesty, good student, and desire to better oneself were ranked the highest. "Is a good student" ranked high for boys and girls by raters of both sexes. The three characteristics pertaining to the child's relationship to peers, especially in terms of popularity, were ranked as least important. Comparisons with earlier research with subjects in the United States suggested some universality of child-rearing values as well as some interesting differences. (Author/MH)

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Selected Child Behaviors Most and Least Valued By Young Adult Mexicans.

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to obtain data concerning values for child behavior from a sample of Mexican adults, and to compare and contrast these data with those obtained in previous research with samples from the United States. The sample consisted of 40 males, mean age 31.1 years, and 40 females, mean age 20.1 years. The Ss were given a list of 22 qualities pertaining to child behavior. They were asked to rank the five traits they considered most important for a 15-year-old girl and a 15-year-old boy, and to check those three characteristics which they felt were least important. A common core of values for male and female raters for both boys and girls was apparent. Responsibility, obedience to parents, honesty, good student, and desire to better oneself were ranked the highest. The three characteristics pertaining to the child's relationship with peers, especially in terms of popularity, were ranked as least important. Comparisons with earlier research with subjects in the United States suggested some universality of child-rearing values as well as some interesting differences.

Selected Child Behaviors Most and Least Valued by Young Adult Mexicans

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Despite Margaret Mead's highly stimulating and provocative research among the South Pacific islanders in the 1920s and 30s, there is a surprising paucity of cross-cultural information regarding all aspects of parental childrearing behaviors, attitudes, and values. Holtzman (1969) has argued that:

> Cross-cultural, comparative approaches are particularly appealing for the study of sociocultural factors in any aspect of human development. Different patterns of child rearing, variations in family life-style, contrasting value systems, sociolinguistic variations, as well as different social orders and their political or economic systems are but a few of the major environmental influences upon human development that require a cross-cultural approach...(p. 126)

A recurring theme in child development research in the United States highlights social class differences. Intelligence, language development, physical health, parental behavior, and parental values have been found to be linked to social class. While the interrelation among parental behavior and expressed parental attitudes and values in childrearing is a complex one, there is reason to

believe that parents' behaviors towards their children reflect in some as yet unidentified way their values and goals in childrearing. Parents reward and reinforce those behaviors that are congruent with their expectations for child behavior. Although parents seldom deliberately list a composite of child behavior goals that they hope to achieve, it is likely that their parenting behavior is guided by a moderately coherent and cohesive set of fundamental values.

In her early work focusing on differences between working-class and lower middle-class parental values, Duvall (1946) described the values of the former group as "traditional," emphasizing neatness and cleanliness, and obedience to and respect for adults. Termed "developmental," middle class parental values emphasized eagerness to learn, happiness, and willingness to share and cooperate.

Kohn and associates have collected data concerning parental values in childrearing from three samples: (1) a group of middle- and working-class parents (Kohn, 1959); (2) a group of mothers and fathers in Turin, Italy (Pearlin & Kohn, 1971); and (3) a national sample survey of fathers of children ages 3 to 15 (Kohn, 1969). In the first study the parents were asked to rank in importance the following childrearing values: (That he is) honest; happy, consi-

derate of others; obeys his parents well; dependable; has good manners; has self-control; popular with other children; a good student; neat and clean; curious about things; ambitious; able to defend himself; affectionate; liked by adults; able to play by himself; acts in a serious way. In an attempt to place parental values in childrearing within a larger sociological framework, Kohn (1963) explained social class differences in terms of the family's position in the social structure, specifically in the occupational hierarchy. "Middle-class occupations require a greater degree of self-direction; working-class occupations, in larger measure, require that one follow explicit rules set down by someone in authority" (p. 476). Kohn contends that these occupational differences underlie the differences he found between the two social classes in the characteristics valued by parents for children. In agreement with Duvall, Kohn (1959) noted that middle-class parents, more than working-class parents, valued curiosity, happiness, considerateness, and most importantly, self-control, while the latter group emphasized obedience, neatness, and cleanliness. In general, there was broad agreement between the mothers and fathers in their rankings of the desirable traits. However, as compared with middle-class mothers, working-class mothers made a greater distinction between boys and girls. They regarded dependability, being a good student, and ambition as more important for

boys, and happiness, good manners, neatness, and cleanliness as more desirable for girls. The fathers of either social class did not make such a sex distinction.

In the context of a larger cross-cultural longitudinal study of school children in Mexico and the United States, Holtzman, Diaz-Guerrero, and Swartz (1975) asked a group of mothers from Mexico City and Austin, Texas, to rate the importance of the following 15 personal traits: loyalty to the church, frankness in dealing with others, good manners, tolerance, independence, patriotism, economy in money matters, knowledge of sex hygiene, concentration, appreciation of art, music, and poetry, getting very good grades in school, curiosity, social concern, strict obedience, and desire to make a name in the world. While significant cross-cultural differences were obtained in all but two of the traits--economy in money matters and good manners--complex interactions between social class and cultural group membership were evident. The least valued traits on the part of the American mothers were the desire to make a name in the world and strict obedience. The former trait was rated highest by the Mexican mothers while strict obedience was valued only by the lower-class Mexican mothers. As compared with the Mexican sample, American mothers attached greater importance to curiosity, tolerance, independence, concentration, and the appreciation of art, music, and poetry. Only the lower-class American

mothers emphasized loyalty to the church.

As discussed earlier, it is difficult to bridge the gap between expressed parental values and actual parental behaviors toward the child. Assuming that a relationship exists between these two, it is even more difficult to identify child behaviors that appear to be a consequence of such parental values and behaviors. Though impressionistic in nature, the following assertion by Maslow and Diaz-Guerrero (1960) is interestingly relevant:

> The visitor to Mexico soon notices that Mexican children behave differently from American children. The general impression is that Mexican children are better behaved, more polite, more helpful... Mexican children seem to resent authority less, to demand less, to be less whining and complaining... to cry less often... They laugh more and seem to enjoy themselves more. (pp 228-229)

Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to obtain data concerning values for child behavior from a sample of Mexican adults. While it was not possible to control a number of variables, some comparisons will be made between the present data and those obtained earlier from subjects in the United States. In addition, differences in child behavior values for boys as compared with girls

will be examined. Such differences have received little attention in previous research which is surprising in view of the emphasis placed on sex differences in child development research.

Method

Subjects. The subjects of the research were 40 females, mean age 20.1 years, ranging from 17-25 years, and 40 males, mean age of 31.1 years, ranging from 23 to 41 years. All of the subjects were attending night classes at an Institute designed to increase the knowledge, productivity, and job skills of workers. The females were all engaged in various aspects of social work. The males held a variety of jobs including lower-level managerial and skilled trades, primarily in factories. The subjects were all residents of Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

Procedure. The data were collected during a regular night class session at the Institute. Each subject was given a list of 22 qualities or characteristics pertaining to child behavior. While a majority of these were drawn from previous research in the areas of values in childrearing, several additional traits were added. The subjects were asked to rank the five traits they considered most important for a 15-year-old to possess, from 1 (most important) to 5. In addition, they were asked to check those three qualities which they felt were least important for a 15-year-old to develop. The rankings were completed twice, first for a 15-year-

old boy, then for a 15-year-old girl. The questionnaire was administered in Spanish by the second author.

Analysis of Data

After recording the rankings of each subject, a weight of five was assigned to those qualities given a ranking of one, a weight of four for those ranked second, a weight of three for those ranked third, a weight of two for those ranked fourth, and, finally, a weight of one for those ranked fifth. Hypothetically, a quality ranked first by all 40 subjects (the male and female data are reported separately) would receive a "score" of 200. The number of subjects choosing each quality at least important was tabulated.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the rankings for the males and females for both the 15-year-old boys and the 15-year-old girls. Only those traits receiving the highest weightings are listed. An arbitrary

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Insert Table 1 about here

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cut-off was made when a large gap or difference existed between a trait and the next most frequently ranked one.

The items which received the greatest number of checks as the least important characteristics are provided in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

Before proceeding with the discussion, a note of caution must be voiced with respect to several considerations. First, comparisons between the male and female samples must be viewed as tentative because of the age and occupational differences. Second, cross-cultural comparisons must take into account such demographic variables as social class/occupational differences. Finally, the fact that the present study employed a somewhat different list of characteristics must be taken into account.

An examination of Table 1 reveals the existence of a common core of values for male and female raters for both boys and girls. Responsibility, obedience to parents, honesty, good student, and desire to better oneself were ranked the highest. The three characteristics pertaining to the child's relationship with peers, especially in terms of popularity, were ranked as least important. While the marked agreement between the male and female raters is in accord with the earlier findings by Kohn, these results seem somewhat surprising in view of the pronounced difference in status between males and females in traditional Mexican culture. While unfortunately no comparable data from an earlier generation are

available, the present findings suggest the possibility of a narrowing of these sex role differences. Furthermore, the characteristics deemed important for boys were very similar to those ranked as important for girls, with few exceptions.

The high ranking given to "wishes to better him/herself" does not fit the stereotype that Mexicans attach little importance to upward mobility. In fact, this is in direct contrast to Kohn's 1959 research finding that "ambition" was ranked low by parents of both social classes. Traditionally, too, the Mexican culture has been viewed by its North American neighbors as typifying a "social ethic" as compared with a "work/competitive ethic." Whatever may be implied, implicitly or explicity, by these labels, several findings in addition to the upward mobility one seem to argue against any simplistic contrasts between two cultures. For example, little importance was given to the traits of popularity and religiousness, while "is a good student" was ranked high for both boys and girls by raters of both sexes. In addition, the much-discussed emphasis on "machismo" in the Mexican culture is not supported by the low ranking given "can protect him/herself physically," especially by the male raters.

In sum, some similarities were apparent between the Mexican sample and the subjects of Kohn's earlier work. For both samples,

honesty and obedience were ranked among the most important traits while ability to defend oneself was considered as relatively unimportant. This suggests at least a limited universality in childrearing goals. In contrast to the Mexican sample, the North American subjects ranked popularity and neatness and cleanliness as important, and ambitiousness as unimportant.

Kohn raised the issue that value concepts may have different meanings for individuals of different cultural backgrounds. For example, middle-class parents may view honesty as meaning truthfulness while working-class parents may interpret honesty as meaning trustworthiness. Kohn was unable to resolve this issue. The present findings do not contribute to a clarification of this point. The results obtained do suggest that changes may be occurring in the traditional sex role assigned to males and females in the Mexican culture. Further, some of the stereotypes regarding childrearing values and goals in the Mexican culture may no longer be valid.

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Table 1

Most Important Characteristics for 15-Year-Olds

15-year-old Boys		15-year-old Girls	
Males	Females	Males	Females
Responsible (119)*	Responsible (104)	Obedient to parents (77)	Obedient to parents (73)
Obedient to parents (71)	Obedient to parents (75)	Responsible (61)	Responsible (57)
Wishes to better himself (66)	Wishes to better himself (74)	Honest (52)	Honest (52)
Honest (62)	A good student (49)	Wishes to better herself (50)	A good student (42)
A good student (52)	Is creative (44)	A good student (45)	Wishes to better herself (35)
Is creative (38)	Honest (33)	Loyal to family (39)	Has self-control (35)
Humble (32)	Has self-control (28)	Has self-control (37)	Humble (32)

*These are weighted "scores" as per description in text.

Table 2

Least Important Characteristics for 15-Year-Olds

15-year-old Boys		15-year-old-Girls	
Males	Females	Males	Females
Popular with opposite sex (26)*	Attractive (22)	Popular with opposite sex (27)	Popular with opposite sex (23)
Attractive (19)	Popular with opposite sex (20)	Popular with other children (18)	Popular with other children (20)
Popular with other children (19)	Popular with other children (19)	Has many friends (18)	Attractive (18)
Has many friends (14)		Can protect herself physically (16)	Humble (11)
Can protect himself physically (13)			Has many friends (10)

*The numbers in parentheses represent the number of Ss, out of an N of 40, checking the item as least important.